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Ways of using audiovisual materials as research tools in elementary school social studies classes are discussed. Instead of using filmstrips or phonograph records as whole class lessons, individuals or small groups can work with them by means of table viewers or earphones without disturbing classmates engaged in other activities. When using still pictures, motivating questions by the teacher can lead the child to involve himself in the picture he sees, and to use what he already knows to make the picture yield more. Finding, choosing, or making pictures which illustrate a newly learned concept is a fine practice in thinking as well as a means of learning the subject at hand. By tracing or projecting a simple outline map and plotting information gained, the child will learn to acquire better skills in mapreading. Opaque and overhead projectors are very useful for this work.

The use of resource persons is an excellent step in research learning, and is easily adapted to individual, small-group, or whole class situations. Historical events, biographies, music, folk tales of other lands, and phonograph records offer excellent possibilities as resource sources. In the use of the motion picture, pupil involvement in such activities as studying catalogues, discussing needs, reading descriptions and reviews, and considering rental costs and shipping time contributes to an interested and responsible audience.

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Stepping Stones in Learning to Think

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Working privately is key to use of AV materials in research

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FOR MANY TEACHERS in the elementary schools, reading is the main if not only resource used in teaching social studies by the research method. While reading is and will remain the backbone of this style of teaching, there is no reason why the broad spectrum of audiovisual materials cannot be brought in to help. As the communication arts develop and diversify, there is increasing need not only to give children practice in using these other channels of thought, but also to help them distinguish good from poor quality.

Let us see how the grade teacher and her pupils might use these tools in research, and as stepping stones in learning to think. We will assume that the usual overview of the new topic has been gained in class discussion and that the pupils have been organized into groups ready to investigate various problems about which they will later report to the class as a whole. We will assume too, that the textbook, supplementary classroom books, the library, and other reading materials provide much of the information the children seek.

For many teachers, the use of an audiovisual material such as a filmstrip or phonograph record automatically signifies a whole-class lesson. One key to the use of these materials in research teaching is to permit individuals and small groups to work with them largely on their own. With table viewers, individualized use of slides and filmstrips can be arranged in day light and without disturbing classmates engaged in other activities. With earphones, records and tapes can be used in much the same way. Another device is to plan the use of sound films by small groups before or after class, or while part of the class is absent pursuing other activities. Viewing picture sets involves no complications at all.

The use of still pictures is a good place to begin a discussion of the special technique of handling AV materials in a research situation. As in the case of films and records, merely putting a picture before a child is no guarantee that he will learn anything from it. Some pictures in books and magazines are well chosen by intelligent editors to illustrate a point. They are captioned to drive this point home. Others are not. They are used because illustrations are customary and appealing or because they are available and cheap. They do not teach. A good caption (or good teacher) will ask questions. Better still, the caption or teacher will bring the pupil to the point where he will begin to ask questions. One might say:

"What do you see in this picture that explains why these people are so poor?"

"What evidence does this picture present that shows that Brazil is a tropical country?"

"How many kinds of transportation can you find in this picture?"

"Judging from what we have read, what do you suppose these houses are made of?"

By means of such questions, the child is led to involve himself in the picture he sees, and to use what he already knows to make the picture yield more.

A further step consists of requiring the child to find, choose, or even make pictures that illustrate a newly learned concept. Comparing, contrasting, summarizing, and proving by means of pictures is fine practice in thinking, as well as a means of learning the subject at hand. For example, if I had a committee studying ancient civilization I would put them to work comparing the buildings and roads of the Greeks, Romans and Egyptians with those of the Aztecs, Incas, and Mayas whom they had studied the previous year. This can be done by the selection of pictures and has the virtue of integrating learning which normally takes place in one grade with that of another. The principles discussed here in viewing still pictures apply as well to single pictures seen in a filmstrip and the sequences of a movie.

Maps are a useful resource for learning, but they have one very serious pitfall. Often they are too detailed for the child's comprehension. One way out of this situation is to have the child trace or project a simple outline map and plot on it the information he has gained from a book, another map, or some other source. Thus

he has made a map to suit his own purposes and has learned to read a map in very concrete fashion. An opaque projector is invaluable in this process. The overhead projector is also useful. With the proper set of transparencies it is possible to build a map progressively to make the tiniest detail visible to every pupil. A third device is a filmstrip of outline maps.

The use of resource persons is an excellent avenue of research learning and is easily adapted to individual, small-group, or whole-class situations. Whether or not the school maintains a formal listing of resource persons, most teachers are aware of such individuals in the community. In understanding the everyday life of the recent past, for example, almost any child could profit by interviewing one of his grandparents. A little scouting around will usually produce some relative, neighbor, or local merchant who has lived part of his life in a foreign country or other interesting region. Nearby universities with foreign students are also likely possibilities. Interviews with persons who have once followed, or now follow, some interesting occupation make valuable experiences for children. They can be interviewed inside or outside of class.

Preparing for the Interview

In either case, before interviewing resource people, it is well to lay the groundwork in class. What do we need to know about England, about life in the 1920's, about running a ferryboat—or whatever this person is able to tell us? How old was Mr. Smith in 1925? Is a bank manager a typical Mexican? What the prospective interviewee might be expected to know must be anticipated and matched with what the class wants to find out. After the interview (or report or visit) it is also desirable to take class time to summarize and evaluate what was gained. The class should also determine if there are still things left to learn.

As a research resource, the phonograph record offers interesting possibilities. Historical events and biographies have been imaginatively transcribed and records provide a unique insight into the music and folk tales of many lands. Again the fact that a particular experience is not appropriate for a whole class should not deter the teacher from directing smaller groups to this medium, using earphones or perhaps having the record played at lunchtime, after school, or at home. A committee may also illustrate a report to the class by playing a selection or two from a record used in their research. Laying the groundwork and evaluating results are just as necessary here. The committee should know not only what the record tells, but why the class needs to know this.

The motion picture, while a tool of great power, poses special problems. Viewing a sound film is almost necessarily a whole-class activity. Most teachers, moreover, do not have film libraries at their disposal. Rentals take time and planning. So, why not involve the children in this very planning process? The films on educational subjects number in the thousands, and even those devoted to a single topic may be numerous. Children become responsible for their own education when they are required to study the catalogs, discuss the needs of their committees, read descriptions and reviews of films, ascertain the availability of funds, consider the rental cost and shipping time, and, in short, reach a real decision after taking real factors into account. Surely this sort of involvement should contribute to an interested and responsible audience when the film arrives. Previewing the film may be a committee responsibility, as may leading the discussion before and after the showing.

An opportunity to learn to think analytically lies in the effort to understand the technique and limitations of each audiovisual medium. Children can be prompted by such questions as:

"Suppose you were illustrating a book, and you could use only five pictures to show the life of people in Sweden. Where and when would you take your photos?"

"Why do you think this movie included Pablo and his grandfather instead of just showing us a Mexican village?"

"Suppose we put a play on tape to show the building of the transcontinental railroad. What real persons will we need to write speeches for? How do we get across the changes the railroad brought to the farmers, the Easterners, the Indians? How do we tell the audience that this is Leland Stanford speaking? How do we put over the idea that the construction foreman is walking toward the other men?"

Recently I explained the technique of planning a motion picture to my fifth-grade class. I discussed the use of closeups, process shots, panoramic views, and aerial shots, and pointed out the need for some narrative thread or viewpoint to hold the movie together. My reward was that what might have been a dull report on Rio de Janeiro turned into a scenario by a bright ten-year-old girl who planned her "movie" around a honeymoon couple in Rio. All the facts she had gleaned from her reading were worked cleverly into the script.

It sometimes helps to ask children how a job, albeit done by professionals, might have been done better, or differently. Many a movie presents too much too fast. Children sense this. Why not bring it out in the open? Other films concentrate on spectacle, or the visually attractive, and fail to tell us how people live, do their work, and so on. Children could discuss whether their purpose in seeing the film was the same as that which the producers evidently had in mind.

Conflicts of authority arise, and can be grist for the teacher's mill. For example, the classroom visitor describes Brazil as a metropolitan society. The class has just seen a film on the primitive people of the Amazon Valley. The two concepts do not jibe. Which is the real Brazil? Are there two Brazils? Are there two U.S.A.'s?

Audiovisual materials, like books, yield their treasures only to trained and purposeful minds. As the newer media carry an ever larger burden of society's communication, there is a growing need for the teacher to give each pupil the skills, the experience and the desire to use them wisely.